



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
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Family and Youth Services Bureau

# **Supporting Your Adolescent**

## **Tips for Parents**

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# Supporting Your Adolescent: Tips for Parents

Adolescence is a time for young people to define their place in the family, peer groups, and the larger community. During this stage of their lives, youth struggle with the transition from childhood to adulthood. During childhood, they depended mainly on their parents for economic and emotional support and direction. In adulthood, though, they will be expected to achieve independence and make choices about school, work, and personal relationships that will affect every aspect of their future.

Without question, adolescence is a difficult time for many young people. During this period, they must contend with physical changes, pressure to conform to current social trends and peer behaviors, and increased expectations from family members, teachers, and other adults. Adolescents also must deal with sometimes conflicting messages from parents, peers, or the media. They struggle with an increasing need to feel as if they “belong.” Young people also feel pressure to perform academically or socially.

For some young people, the usual challenges of adolescence are compounded by difficult family situations, overcrowded classrooms, disintegrating neighborhoods, or exposure to alcohol or other drugs. Without support and guidance, these young people may fall victim to behaviors that place them, and others, at risk. In our society, those behaviors include dropping out of school, running away from home, joining gangs, and using alcohol or drugs or becoming involved in other law-breaking behaviors. Some

youth may become despondent, leading to academic problems, social isolation, or self-destructive behavior.

## **Growing Up Today**

Each generation of young people and their families faces new, and perhaps more challenging, circumstances. Life for many young people is characterized by shrinking family incomes and growing options with regard to careers, beliefs, and lifestyle choices. More transient lifestyles result in isolation from extended families and a breakdown in the feeling of community. Today, therefore, youth need greater self-direction and poise than ever before to successfully move from adolescence to adulthood.

Today's community and social structures place high demands on young people and their families. Fortunately, though, those systems also offer varied forms of support. Most communities have counseling services, specialized groups, hotlines, and educational courses for both youth and their parents.

Helping your child move to independence requires that you understand healthy adolescent development and how to find the resources that can help you when your child gets off track.

## **Tips for Parenting When Your Child Becomes an Adolescent**


During adolescence, young people begin to take risks and experiment. They do so because they are moving from a family-centered world to the larger community within which they will begin to define their own identity. They may choose

friends their parents do not approve of or try alcohol or other drugs. They may wear clothing that is trendy and generational, begin comparing their families' lifestyles with those of other families, or break rules imposed by their parents or the larger community.

Through these actions, young people are testing the limits. They are recreating themselves in a fashion that they believe will allow them to survive without the day-to-day guidance of their parents. They are also trying to shift the balance of power and authority in their own direction. Parents are understandably troubled by the confrontational nature of some adolescent behavior. They also worry about other actions that may threaten the safety of their child.


While there are no easy answers in parenting, the following strategies may help you support your child during adolescence while reducing the risk of serious harm to either your child or another person:

- ◆ Educate yourself about adolescent development. Learn about the behaviors to expect, the effects of physical changes, and ways to help your child deal with change. (See p. 9 for information on how to seek guidance on dealing with your adolescent, and p. 17 for a list of resource materials.)
- ◆ Remember your own adolescence: your changing feelings, anger at authority, and fears and hopes. Look at your adolescent's behavior in the context of those memories to help you keep perspective.

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- ◆ Think about taking a course on good parenting. Parenting is a learned skill. Training can help even experienced parents by giving them new tools for supporting children through adolescence.
  - ◆ Listen more than talk. Young people have spent at least a decade as listeners in most situations. During adolescence, they want and need the chance to share their feelings and ideas and to begin recasting family beliefs, stories, and traditions in light of their changing identity.
  - ◆ Teach your adolescent about the joys *and* troubles of life and ways to revel in the good times and cope with the bad. The myths that life is always easy or fair or that one should always be happy can lead to frustration for young people dealing with the realities of life.
  - ◆ Use positive reinforcement for positive behavior whenever possible; it is far more effective than criticism or punishment for negative behavior. Words that belittle can hurt your adolescent's self-esteem. The most useful tools in raising young people are love, compassion, sensitivity, praise, understanding, and communication.
  - ◆ Teach your adolescent that rights and responsibilities go hand in hand, and give your child increasing responsibility for his or her personal well-being and that of the family. Provide your child opportunities to help around the house and to become involved in family decision-making discussions. In doing so, seek your child's input

and help him or her to understand the process that you use to make those decisions. Look for situations that can allow your child to test decision-making skills with the support of caring adults. Supportive adults can help provide your child with an understanding of the impact of those decisions on both your child and others. They also can assist your adolescent in coping with the results of these choices.

- ◆ Help your adolescent move toward independence. For each youth, the need to assert independence will happen at different times and through different means. Becoming attuned to your children's attempts to operate independently will help you support those efforts and provide guidance when early attempts at decision-making result in less than desired outcomes. It is sometimes difficult for parents to give up control out of concern for their child's safety. Remember, though, that adolescents' skills in coping with increasing responsibility will be enhanced by parents' willingness to support them as they make choices and face new challenges.
- ◆ Offer your child chances to become involved in the community. All young people are searching to find their place in the world. Involving adolescents in developing solutions to community problems can shift their focus from themselves and help them to develop skills and feel involved and empowered.

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- ◆ Spend quality *and* quantity time with your adolescent. Adolescence is a time when young people naturally begin to pull away from the family and spend more time at school, with friends, or at a job. Still, time spent with caring parents is key to young people's ability to grow emotionally and socially. Take advantage of times that your adolescent is home, over dinner or watching a ball game, to continue building your relationship. Become involved in your child's outside interests. Your involvement will both show your support and help you stay informed about your child's life.
  - ◆ Encourage other caring adults, including friends and relatives, to spend time with your adolescent. Aunts and uncles or adult neighbors can offer your child further support, guidance, and attention.
  - ◆ Accept that you have feelings too. You may feel frustrated, angry, discouraged, or sad during difficult times with your adolescent. Being a good parent doesn't mean being perfect. Model the ability to apologize when you feel that you let your emotions get the best of you. Your example will help your child understand human frailty and ways of mending relationships strained by stress or disagreement.
  - ◆ Seek support and guidance for *yourself* in dealing with the changes in a child moving through adolescence. Learn about the signs of crisis, and talk with other parents or professionals. By doing so, you can begin to tell the difference between adolescent behavior that indicates a youth in crisis

and the usual behavior associated with a life passage.

- ◆ Remember that most youth have problems at some time. Acting-out behavior can be a normal part of becoming an adult. Parents sometimes needlessly feel embarrassed when their child is having trouble. Do not assume that your child's behavior always reflects on the quality of your parenting.
- ◆ Do not always push for drastic or dramatic solutions. Sometimes young people just need time and support to work through their problems.
- ◆ Continue to provide all of your children with positive feedback and opportunities to grow. Reflect on what you wanted for your children during better times: health, happiness, and movement toward a promising future. Offer them chances to strengthen their skills and develop a sense of competence, usefulness, and belonging.

### **When Your Adolescent Needs Help**

All youth need daily support and guidance. But some young people whose adolescence is marked by more serious struggles may require help from outside the family. Many people believe that family matters should be kept private. Seeking help, however, simply means that you are drawing on every community resource that you can to support your child.

It is never too late to reach out for help. But early intervention with young people who are troubled is crucial to reducing the damage that

problems, or the resulting acting-out behavior, might cause. Watch for these signs that your child might need help in dealing with the difficulties of adolescence:

- ◆ Large amounts of time spent alone, and isolation from family and friends
- ◆ Sudden changes in school performance
- ◆ Drastic mood swings or changes in behavior
- ◆ Changes in your child's peer group or separation from long-time friends
- ◆ Lack of interest in hobbies or social and recreational activities

Keep in mind that these signs do not always mean that your adolescent is in trouble. Some changes in friendships, for example, are normal as young people mature and find new interests. Changes in the family situation, such as moving to a new town, also can affect adolescent behavior as they deal with leaving friends and joining a new school.

Also, all young people are different. An introverted youth, for example, may enjoy spending time alone reading. On the other hand, an extroverted young person may have trouble focusing on school in the less structured academic situations of most middle or junior high schools. Parents usually can best assess how their children are doing on the basis of experience. Yet during adolescence, youth often stop sharing as much information with their parents as they did at younger ages.

The first step for parents in dealing with concerns about their adolescents, therefore, is to improve or reopen the lines of communication. Simply talking with adolescents, without focusing on immediate concerns, gives young people the chance to share their struggles or provide reassurance that they are comfortable and doing well.

If problems appear to persist and your child seems reluctant or unable to discuss them with you, try talking with him or her in a nonconfrontational manner about the changes that you notice. Express your concern for your child's well-being and your interest in helping in any way possible. But be prepared for a defensive reaction, and listen and ask questions. Be willing to help your adolescent talk through problems, rather than immediately giving solutions.

If your efforts to talk with your child do not appear to be working, you might get an outside perspective from a close and trusted friend or relative. You also can seek support and guidance on dealing with your teen through other community resources:

- ◆ Health care professionals, guidance counselors, teachers, or the principal at your child's school
- ◆ Your local government, which may offer service to families through a range of social service agencies (You can find the telephone numbers for local government agencies in your phone book. Look for agencies with the following key words: youth, families, mental health, social services, human services, or crisis intervention. Many local governments also

have an Information and Referral line that you can call for help in finding the right services.)

- ◆ Your local chapter of the United Way, which typically funds social service programs in communities
- ◆ Community organizations that offer services to young people and their families (Look in the Yellow Pages under “Youth Organizations” or “Youth Centers.”)
- ◆ The social work or social service department of a local hospital, especially a children’s hospital
- ◆ The employee assistance program at your workplace
- ◆ Parent support groups or parenting education classes that address parenting issues or specific issues such as adolescent drug use
- ◆ Independent counselors and psychologists in your area (Look in the Yellow Pages under “Psychologists” or “Therapists.”)

In addition, a good way to help your adolescent through troubled times is to focus on yourself. By improving your ability to cope with the effects of your adolescent’s changing behavior, you make it more likely that you will be able to help your child. Seeking help for yourself also shifts the focus away from your adolescent, who may feel exposed and vulnerable under the sudden scrutiny of a range of outsiders. By looking for help for yourself, you are modeling good

copng skills and learning new tools for dealing with stress. Perhaps most importantly, you are reassuring your adolescent that the family works through its difficult times without blaming any family member.

## **Making the Most of Available Resources**

Most social service agencies or helping organizations offer valuable services. Generally, their staff truly care about helping you and your adolescent. Not all agencies, however, may offer the services that you need. Some also may have a style of offering services that may not be comfortable for you or your family. So it is important, even in crisis, that you treat the selection of an agency to assist you as you would any other important consumer decision, such as buying a car or a house. Look at a number of options and ask agencies questions such as the following:

- ◆ Could you describe the philosophy of the agency regarding working with adolescents and their families?

(Most youth professionals believe that services to young people should address the total needs of your child. An agency with such a “holistic” approach to helping your child will offer health care, counseling, recreation, and family support, either directly or by referral to other agencies. To be effective, these services should help young people develop a sense of belonging, give them chances to master skills and tasks, assist them in learning how to make choices about their future, and support their efforts to contribute to the community.)

- ◆ Could you describe the services you offer (type, where offered, length of time services are available)?
- ◆ What is the makeup of your staff (for example, racial/ethnic background, gender, and education and experience level)?
- ◆ Are there other community agencies that can share their perspective with me about the work of your agency with young people and their families?
- ◆ What is expected of my child and me if we participate in your services or program (for example, time and contractual obligations)?
- ◆ If we are assigned to work with one of your staff with whom we do not feel comfortable, would we be able to request a change?
- ◆ Will all information on my child's case be held confidential?
- ◆ What would you do if your staff appeared unable to help my child or me?
- ◆ How soon could we access the services (is there a waiting list)?
- ◆ What is the cost of the services?
- ◆ Is any financial assistance available to help with this cost (for example, Medicaid)?
- ◆ What do I do next if I would like to have my child receive these services?

Keep detailed notes on every contact that you make. These notes should include the name of staff people with whom you speak, what they tell you, whether they are sending more information in the mail, how you felt about the interaction, and the date. You can use the information later to choose the agency that seems most appropriate.

You may run into obstacles while seeking assistance for your child. Occasionally, for example, you may speak with someone who does not appear to fully understand the issues facing you and your child. Or you might find yourself being referred from agency to agency. At these times, get support and advice from friends and relatives. They can help you view such obstacles for what they are: "bumps in the road" on the way to finding help rather than dead ends. Your persistence will pay off when you find services that meet the needs of your family.

## **When Your Adolescent Is In Trouble**

Despite a parent's best efforts, some young people find themselves in trouble with the law. Peer pressure, the need to assert independence, or misjudgments can place your adolescent at risk of involvement in activities that result in arrest and processing through the local juvenile justice system.

Juvenile justice systems vary widely between communities. If your child becomes involved in the juvenile justice system, your first step is to learn how the system in your area works. This knowledge will allow you to advocate for an outcome that teaches your child about the results of inappropriate behavior without hurting his or her prospects for the future.

Begin by asking the processing officer at the police station (usually an officer in the juvenile division) to explain the process to you:

- ◆ Why was my child arrested?
- ◆ Will you have to detain my child or can he or she be released in my custody? Will we need to post bond?
- ◆ Will my child have a record simply as a result of the arrest?
- ◆ What happens next?
- ◆ Whom should I speak with to get assistance if my child is referred to juvenile court?

In many cases, particularly for minor offenses or a first-time arrest, youth will be released into their parent's custody. They also may be diverted into a community service program where they will be expected to perform volunteer service. In exchange, the charges against them will be dropped.

If your child is referred to juvenile court, however, what happens next will depend on the structure of the local system, the actions of the prosecutor's office, and the availability of diversion or treatment programs. The prosecutor and juvenile court staff can tell you what to expect from the process. (Juvenile court staff include intake or probation department staff who often conduct preliminary investigations. These investigations provide juvenile court judges with background information they use to decide on dispositions.)

You also are well advised to seek legal counsel if your child is referred to the court system. Youth of families without financial resources can request counsel from the local public defender's office. Even if you obtain a lawyer to represent your child, you should accompany your teen through all juvenile justice system processing: intake, meetings with juvenile court staff and diversionary or treatment program staff, and any court hearings.

Keep in mind that the main intent of most juvenile justice systems is to help young people redirect their lives, not simply to punish them. Still, your role in advocating for your child is crucial. There are several alternatives to a court hearing, court decision, or detention. Your child can be diverted, for example, into a treatment program. Further, when a court hearing and decision are required, courts usually view a parent's involvement in the case positively when making a decision.

Further, it often is in times of crisis that bonds between parents and adolescents are reaffirmed. At those times, youth again turn to their parents for support and protection. Troubling circumstances may present parents of adolescents with opportunities to show their love and support, to help their child obtain services to deal with specific problems, and to strengthen interpersonal connections that will benefit the family for years to come.

# Print Resources for Parents\*

***Keeping Youth Drug-Free: A Guide for Parents, Grandparents, Elders, Mentors, and Other Caregivers.***

This booklet provides guidelines to parents and caregivers on communicating with youth about drug prevention and on helping them make positive decisions. Year published: 1996.

Available free from the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI), P.O. Box 2345, Rockville, MD 20847-2345; Phone: (800) 729-6686.

***Parents, Teens and Boundaries: How to Draw the Line.***

This guide for parents is based on the premise that children need limits so they feel safe and secure. During adolescence, however, young people often test those limits so that they are able to grow and learn. The author presents practical strategies for parents on how to avoid conflict, resolve problems, and establish a foundation for mutual love and respect with their children. Part 1 explores the concept of boundaries and setting limits. Part 2 offers 20 relationship-building ingredients, such as love and acceptance. Author: J. Bluestein. Year Published: 1993. Available from Health Communications, Inc., 3201 S.W. 15th Street, Deerfield Beach, FL 33442-8190; Phone: (305) 360-0909.

*\* This list of publications is intended to provide you with information on parenting issues; readers should not presume this list is exhaustive. Moreover, points of view and opinions expressed in these materials do not necessarily represent the official position of the Family and Youth Services Bureau or the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth.*

***Positive Discipline for Teenagers: Resolving Conflict With Your Teenage Son or Daughter.*** This book describes individuation, the process of establishing a separate identity, which every teen must go through to reach his or her full potential. The book offers advice to help adults and adolescents turn their conflicts into friendship. It also describes how parents can build a positive relationship with their teenagers based on understanding and communication. The book shares how parents can get cooperation from their children without threats and explains how to identify normal versus excessive rebellion. Authors: L. Lott and J. Nelsen. Year published: 1994. Available from Prima Publishing, P.O. Box 1260BK, Rocklin, CA 95677; Phone: (916) 632-4400.

***Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World: Seven Building Blocks for Developing Capable Young People.*** The authors offer a common-sense approach for helping children become responsible and self-reliant. The book includes a historical overview of families. It also discusses the cultural changes, such as family size, technology, and education, that have had an impact on today's lifestyles. The authors present a parenting strategy based on seven tools: (1) personal capabilities, (2) personal significance, (3) power over environment, (4) intrapersonal skills, (5) interpersonal skills, (6) systemic skills, and (7) judgmental skills. Authors: H.S. Glenn and J. Nelsen. Year published: 1989. Available from Prima Publishing, P.O. Box 1260BK, Rocklin, CA 95677; Phone: (916) 632-4400.

***Safeguarding Your Teenager From the Dragons of Life: A Parent's Guide to the Adolescent Years.*** This *Guide* offers insights designed to help parents understand the world teenagers live in. It explores

relationships in a teen's life, including with parents and stepparents, and other family dynamics. The *Guide* also highlights developmental stages (intellectual, physical, psychological, social, moral, and ethical) for each age group. Practical suggestions cover parenting issues from communication and discipline to what to do if your teen is out of control. The *Guide* also addresses how to keep teens drug and alcohol free and help them to achieve success in school, develop sexual responsibility, and cultivate personal and social responsibility. Author: B.B. Youngs. Year published: 1993. Available from Health Communications, Inc., 3201 S.W. 15th Street, Deerfield Beach, FL 33442-8190; Phone: (305) 360-0909.

***You and Your Adolescent: A Parent's Guide for Ages 10-20.*** This publication contains practical information about the myths of adolescence, adolescent issues, and the principles of effective parenting. The *Guide* also describes when and how to get professional help and addresses the special concerns of stepparents and working and divorced parents. The main text is organized chronologically into sections on early and middle adolescence and young adulthood. Each section includes discussions of physical health and development, psychological and intellectual growth, and the adolescent's school and social world. Authors: L. Steinberg and A. Levine. Year published: 1990. Available from HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., P.O. Box 588, Dunmore, PA 18512; Phone: (212) 207-7000.

# Glossary of Terms

This glossary provides you with definitions of terms that you may encounter as you seek assistance for your child. Note that words in *italic* are defined in this glossary. (*Italic* does not imply emphasis but is used here for cross-reference purposes only.)

**Acquittal:** Judgment of the court that a person is not guilty of the offense(s) for which he or she has been tried. The judgment is made by a jury or a judicial officer.

**Adjudicate:** To settle a case by judicial procedure.

**Adjudication hearing:** Stage in *juvenile court* proceedings in which arguments, testimony, and evidence are presented to determine whether a youth actually committed the alleged offense.

**Aftercare:** Control, supervision, and care exercised over youth after they leave community-based programs or are released from juvenile facilities. Aftercare may include *probation*, counseling, enrollment in a community program, or other forms of treatment. Aftercare services are designed to support young people's return to their families and communities and to lessen the chance that they will get in trouble again.

**Child abuse:** Behavior directed toward a child by an adult that harms a child's physical or emotional health and development. Child abuse includes four major categories: *physical abuse*, *sexual abuse*, *emotional abuse*, and *neglect*.

**Chin or Cin:** Commonly used abbreviation for “child in need of supervision.”

**Classification:** Process through which the educational, vocational, treatment, and security needs of a youth offender are determined.

**Commitment:** Action of a judicial officer ordering that a young person who has been alleged or judged to have committed an offense be placed in a particular kind of confinement or community *residential program*.

**Correctional facility:** Facility for the confinement of individuals accused or convicted of criminal or delinquent activity.

**Delinquent offense:** An act committed by a youth that would be a crime if committed by an adult. Examples include assault, burglary, or possession of illegal drugs.

**Dependency case:** A case in which *neglect* or *physical, sexual, or emotional abuse* of a young person by a parent is alleged.

**Dependent:** A legal term denoting a young person who is alleged to have been *neglected* or *physically, sexually, or emotionally abused* by a parent and has come to the attention of the court.

**Detention:** Temporary confinement of a youth alleged to be delinquent pending pretrial release, *juvenile court* proceedings, or *disposition*.

**Disposition:** The decision reached concerning a young person’s case. Examples include, but are not limited to, a *juvenile court* judge’s decision to dismiss the case or to order a young person to

participate in a drug treatment program or perform community service. Juvenile court case dispositions fall into the following categories:

- ◆ **Dismissal:** An order of the court disposing of a case without conducting a trial of the issues. Dismissal may occur when there is a finding of insufficient evidence to bring the matter to trial, when no more decisions or actions are anticipated, or when the case is already being handled by another court.
- ◆ **Placement:** Removing a youth found to have committed an offense from the home and placing him or her elsewhere for a specified period of time, such as in a *juvenile* or other facility.
- ◆ **Probation:** Placing a youth found to have committed an offense under the supervision of the court. During probation, the young person must maintain good behavior, not commit another offense, and meet any other conditions the court may deem appropriate to impose.
- ◆ **Probation before judgment:** Placing a youth found to have committed an offense on *probation* before the judge makes a final decision. Successful completion of the probation period results in a complete *dismissal* of the charges without any finding of involvement by the young person in the offense.
- ◆ **Transfer or waiver to adult criminal court:** Transfer of a young person’s case to a court normally used to try adults for violations of criminal law, such as murder,

rape, robbery, burglary, or distribution of illegal drugs. A *juvenile's* case usually is transferred to adult criminal court because of the serious nature of the alleged offense.

◆ **Other:** A youth found to have committed an offense may be given a *disposition* other than a *commitment* or *probation*, such as requiring participation in a drug abuse treatment system, payment of fines, or performance of community service.

**Disposition hearing:** Hearing held after the *adjudication hearing* in which the judge determines the *disposition* of a young person's case.

**Diversion:** Channeling young people into programs as an alternative to processing their cases through the *juvenile court*. A youth, for example, might be referred to a community service program to perform volunteer work to "repay" the community.

**Drug testing:** Examination of a person's urine samples to determine the presence or absence of certain drugs.

**Emotional abuse:** Verbally mistreating or withholding positive emotional support from a child. Emotional abuse involves an adult speaking to a child in ways that are intended to demean, shame, threaten, blame, intimidate, or unfairly criticize the child.

**Group home:** A nonsecure program in which a group of young people live and receive services at the program facility under the supervision of adult staff. Group homes emphasize family-style living in a homelike atmosphere. Although

many youth living in group homes are ordered there by the court, group homes may also house abused or *neglected* youth who are placed there by social service agencies.

**Hearing:** A court proceeding to decide on a course of action or to determine a young person's involvement or noninvolvement in an offense. Arguments, witnesses, and evidence are heard by a judicial officer or administrative body in making the decision.

**Holistic or wraparound services:** In the wrap-around service approach, a team of professionals from different disciplines works with a young person and his or her family to offer services that meet their specific needs. The team also may work with the family in a location that is comfortable for the family, for example, at their home or at the young person's school.

**Intake/arrest:** Action of taking a youth into police custody for the purpose of charging him or her with a delinquent act. The juvenile justice process often begins with an investigation by a police officer, either because he or she observes a delinquent act being committed or because such an act is reported. The police officer will generally take one of three actions at intake or arrest: (1) release the youth to his or her parents with a warning or reprimand, (2) release the youth to the parents under the condition that the youth enroll in a community *diversion* program, or (3) keep the youth in custody and refer the matter to the juvenile court's *intake officer* for further processing.

**Intake decision:** Recommendation made by the juvenile court's intake officer to either

handle the case informally or schedule the case for a *hearing in juvenile court*.

**Intake hearing:** Early stage in *juvenile court* proceedings in which an *intake officer* decides to either handle the case informally or schedule the case for a juvenile court *hearing*.

**Intake officer:** An official who receives, reviews, and processes cases in which a young person is alleged to have committed an offense. The intake officer can recommend either handling the case informally or scheduling the case for a *hearing in juvenile court*. The intake officer may also provide referrals for *juveniles* and their families to other community agencies.

**Interstate Compact on Juveniles:** An accord signed in 1955 between all State governments that regulates how States handle youth who have committed a *status* or *delinquent offense* and are picked up by police outside of their home State.

**Juvenile:** A young person at or below the upper age of *juvenile court* authority, as defined in the local jurisdiction. In most States, young people age 18 or younger fall under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court.

**Juvenile court:** A court with authority over cases involving individuals under a specified age, usually 18 years.

**Mandatory release:** Release from an institution required by law when an individual has been confined for a period equal to his or her full sentence minus time for good behavior, if any.

**Mediation:** An alternative to a court proceeding in which a neutral person assists two or more people to resolve a conflict and reach a solution acceptable to all sides.

**Medicaid:** A Federal program that provides funds for medical services for people with low incomes.

**Neglect:** Failure by a parent to provide for the basic needs of a child, such as for shelter, food, or clothing.

**Nonpetitioned (informally handled) case:** A case decided by juvenile court *intake officers* rather than through a *hearing in juvenile court*.

**Nonresidential program:** Program that provides services to youth who live at home and report to the program on a daily basis or as scheduled. Young people in such a program require more attention than that provided by *probation* and *aftercare* services. Often the program operates its own education program through the local school district.

**Petition:** The formal charging document filed in *juvenile court* alleging that a youth has committed a *status* or *delinquent offense* or is a *dependent*. A petition asks that the court hear the young person's case or, in certain delinquency cases, that the court transfer the case to adult criminal court so that the young person can be prosecuted as an adult.

**Petitioned (formally handled) case:** A case handled through a *hearing in juvenile court* or transferred to adult criminal court.

**Physical abuse:** Physical punishment of a child by an adult that is unreasonable in light of the age, condition, and disposition of the child and other surrounding circumstances.

**Placement:** Removing a youth found to have committed an offense from the home and placing him or her elsewhere for a period, such as in a *juvenile* facility or *group home*.

**Predisposition investigation:** Investigation into the background and character of a young person who has been determined to have committed a *delinquent offense*. The investigation collects information that will assist the court in determining the most appropriate *disposition*.

**Probation:** Placing a youth found to have committed an offense under the supervision of the court. During probation, the young person must maintain good behavior, not commit another offense, and meet any other conditions the court may deem appropriate to impose.

**Probation before judgment:** Placing a youth found to have committed an offense on *probation* before the judge makes a final decision. Successful completion of the probation period results in a complete dismissal of the charges without any finding of involvement by the young person in the offense.

**Recidivism:** Repetition of criminal behavior.

**Residential program:** Program in which youth live on site in program housing. Residential programs do not have the security fences and security hardware typically associated with *correctional* or *detention facilities*. A residential program, for

example, could be located in a converted apartment building or a single-family home.

**Runaway or emergency shelter:** A center that provides services to address the immediate needs of runaway youth for food, clothing, and shelter.

**Sexual abuse:** Includes incest, sexual molestation, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism, and other acts of sexual exploitation carried out toward a child. Such abuse may be nonphysical, for example, obscene phone calls or indecent exposure, or physical, for example, fondling or intercourse.

**Shelter care:** Any nonsecure public or private facility that provides either (1) temporary *placement* for alleged or *adjudicated status offenders* prior to the issuance of a *disposition* order or (2) longer term care under a *juvenile court* disposition order.

**Status offenses:** Behavior that is considered an offense only if carried out by a young person. Status offenses are handled only by the *juvenile court* and include the following:

- ◆ **Curfew violation:** Breaking a regulation requiring young people to leave the streets or be at home at a prescribed hour
- ◆ **Running away:** Leaving the home of parents, guardians, or custodians without permission for an extended period
- ◆ **Status liquor law violations:** Violating laws restricting the possession, purchase, or consumption of liquor by minors
- ◆ **Truancy:** Failing to attend school

### **Training schools, camps, and ranches:**

Nonsecure *residential programs* providing services to youth. Training schools also are known as youth development centers, youth villages, youth treatment centers, youth service centers, or schools or homes for boys or girls. Camps and ranches generally are located in relatively remote or rural areas. Camps have structured programs that emphasize outdoor work, including conservation and related activities. On ranches, youth usually participate in a structured program of education, recreation, and facility maintenance, including responsibility for the physical plant, its equipment, and livestock.

### **Transfer or waiver to adult criminal court:**

Transfer of a young person's case to a court normally used to try adults for violations of criminal law, such as murder, rape, robbery, burglary, or distribution of illegal drugs. A *juvenile's* case is transferred to adult criminal court usually because of the serious nature of the alleged offense.

**Valid court order:** Order of a *juvenile court* judge. A juvenile court *hearing*, for example, might result in a young person receiving a valid court order to receive counseling.

**Violation of a valid court order:** Failure of a status offender to comply with an order of the court, such as to receive counseling. In such cases, the court may place the child in custody.

## **About the Family and Youth Services Bureau**

The mission of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) is to provide national leadership on youth issues and to assist individuals and organizations in providing effective, comprehensive services for youth in at-risk situations and their families. A primary goal of FYSB programs is to provide positive alternatives for youth, ensure their safety, and maximize their potential to take advantage of available opportunities.

FYSB, located in the Administration on Children, Youth and Families; Administration for Children and Families; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, administers grant programs that support locally based services for young people.

FYSB also funds research and demonstration projects to advance our knowledge of runaway and homeless youth issues; supports the National Runaway Switchboard, a confidential, 24-hour, toll-free hotline for runaway youth; funds the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY); and offers training and technical assistance through a regional system of providers.

# About the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth

The National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY) is part of a coordinated Federal response to the growing need to link youth service professionals, policymakers, and the general public in their efforts to help families and youth. The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) established NCFY to serve as a central information collection and dissemination resource.

NCFY actively acquires, analyzes, and distributes the latest information about successful program approaches, available resources, and current activities relevant to the youth service field. FYSB's goal in creating NCFY was to facilitate communication on strategies for supporting families and youth.

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